

*Will Boost Federal Protection Designations on more than Three Miles of River and Prevent New Mining Claims*

Washington, D.C. – Seeking to protect the Chetco River from expanded suction dredge mining that threatens salmon and steelhead breeding grounds, U.S. Senators Ron Wyden (D-Ore.) and Jeff Merkley (D-Ore.), and U.S. Representative Peter DeFazio (D-Ore.) introduced bills in both the House and the Senate to permanently raise the federal protection levels of more than three miles of the river and put in place new prohibitions on future mining that will preserve the Wild and Scenic portions of the river. U.S. Representatives Earl Blumenauer (D-Ore.) and David Wu (D-Ore.) have also cosponsored the legislation.

Under the legislation simultaneously introduced in the House and the Senate, portions of the Chetco River would be upgraded from Scenic to Wild while other portions would be upgraded from Recreational to Scenic.

“This legislation would protect the Chetco from the threats of out-of-state miners, preserve it for generations and save critical salmon habitat,” Wyden said. “Suction dredge mining presents a clear danger to the Chetco, and we want to do everything we can to prevent it.”

“The Chetco River is one of our state’s most pristine and beautiful rivers,” DeFazio said. “It should be enjoyed by all Oregonians, not just a few dozen miners who can potentially patent mining rights on the river at 19th Century prices using 21st Century technology. This legislation will help put an end to the often illegal, sometimes violent, user conflicts between a small group of rogue miners and the general public in southwest Oregon.”

“The Chetco River is one of the most endangered rivers in America and opening it up to destructive mining would put the health of the river and its fisheries at even greater risk,” said Merkley. “We have a responsibility to protect the Chetco River and prevent threats to the livelihood of Oregon’s salmon and steelhead fishermen.”

The Chetco River was recently identified by American Rivers as one of the nation’s most endangered rivers. The legislation introduced by Wyden, Merkley and DeFazio would provide

federal distinction for much of the Chetco river as Wild and Scenic, carrying with it protections meant to preserve the waterway. The legislation would also prohibit any new mining claims along the river and will require current claims to meet a rigorous validation process in order to have their claims maintained. Earlier this year, Senator Wyden, Senator Merkley and Representative DeFazio asked the Obama administration to exempt the Chetco River from an antiquated 1872 law that would have allowed the mining to proceed.